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Week of
October 5, 1942

Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS

1942

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†"Wine, Women and Song" opened Monday, September 28th, at the Ambassador Theatre.
†"Hello, Out There" and "Magic" opened Tuesday, September 29th, at the Belasco Theatre.
†"Strip for Action" opened Wednesday, September 30th, at the National Theatre.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

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NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN

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"Strip for Action"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 1, 1942

'Strip for Action' at National Is 60 Per Cent. Riot, 40 Corn

"Strip for Action," comedy by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse. Produced by Oscar Serlin and the authors at the National Theatre, New York, Sept. 30, 1942.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

OF COURSE the "Life With Father" authors, the Messrs. Lindsay and Crouse, could not tell a year ago that this early theatre season was going to be devoted almost exclusively to featuring the stripteuse and her sister, the more emotional bumpeuse.

Consequently they had no way of knowing the competition they would run into with their new comedy, "Strip for Action," which opened at the National Theatre last night before this season's smartest audience.

They had a grand idea for their comedy. Nutsy, a fun-loving and fairly irresponsible draftee, who had been a burlesque comic all his life, decided that he would like to give a show for his buddies in the village theatre near their camp.

Not being on speaking terms with his superior officers, he made most of the arrangements without consulting anybody but the show folks.

Out of Luck

When the troupers arrived, therefore, it looked for a while as though there wasn't going to be any show. Then Squee, the granddaughter of a veteran of the Spanish-American war, whose mother was Za-za, the greatest stripper of her day, produced a letter in which the Chief of Staff of this particular man's army had agreed to do anything he could for her family.

Down to Washington in the Colonel's car, stolen for the occasion, ride the comedian and the girl and, in the comedy's best scene, wheedle an order out of the Chief giving them permission to give their show.

Back to camp, with the show in rehearsal and in action for the rest of the evening. It is the repetition of the rehearsal scenes that slow the action and gum the fun. Corny burlesque is still corny burlesque, however you slice it, and a little goes pretty far with this audience.

The first half of "Strip for Action," and all the legitimate comedy scenes with which the action is studded, are smartly written and hilariously played.

There is Billy Koud, a perfect old-time burleycue stage manager right off the Columbia Wheel, to put the leggy ladies of the line through their numbers, and Billy is a find for the job.

Good Actors

There is Keenan Wynn to play the irrepressible Nutsy and make you believe in him, however extravagant the situations they give him. Young Mr. Wynn, by all the signs is the coming light comedian of his day.

There is little Eleanor Lynn to sweeten and make reasonable the burlesque romance when she runs away from the seminary determined to take up stripping as a career. (The boys had promised Za-Za that they would see Squee got an education, even if they had to send her to Vassar.)

There is Joey Faye to give an authentic burlesque atmosphere to the noisy comic scenes (a little too much of Joey, I'd say) and Murray Leonard to play straight for him.

And there is Jean Carter, also right off the Wheel, who knows her strip and her bumps and gets a lot of fun out of trying to train a virgin drummer when to accentuate her rhythym.

There are also several good legitimate actors to play the straight roles—Paul Huber, Harry Bannister, Leslie Barrie and Leonard Patrick among them.

The settings are amusingly in the groove. Bretaigne Windust has kept the pace warm. There is a lot of fun in "Strip for Action." Enough to keep it here until holiday time, I'll say. And more than enough to guarantee a picture sale.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
October 1, 1942

Lindsay & Crouse End the Drought

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THE new season, which has been skulking behind bushes, crouching under a hedge, and hiding in the corner, has bounced into full view at last. The two gentlemen who adapted *Life With Father* and produced *Arsenic and Old Lace* have done it again. Digging down into the theatrical ragbag, they have pieced together from old odds and ends a show that by some sort of miracle is remarkably fresh, and that much of the time is uproariously funny. Faultless *Strip for Action* certain is not. By the standards of the tonier Schools of Drama it's even scandalously untidy. But to give you the gist of it with all possible speed and simplicity, I can't remember when I've had a better time in the theater.

The secret of *Strip for Action's* success is that it combines a whole lot of things into a fetching and wacky whole. It's first and foremost, back and front, a laugh show, with the gags whizzing out at you a dozen a minute, and more of them landing than not. But the plot has to do with staging a low-grade burlesque show for the Army and as part of the business you get a stageful of men in uniform, while as part of the fun you're given the bumps and the grind, strip-teasers and straight men, in a cock-eyed fiddle-faddle that is less burlesque than a burlesque of burlesque.

The plot itself is the least of the matter. A private who used to be in burlesque invites his old pals to come to camp and give the boys the works. He forgets, however, to obtain permission for the jamboree, and at the next-to-last minute the show is called off. Undaunted, Nutsy goes A.W.O.L., steals the major's car, and drives with his girl to the War Department in Washington, where, for reasons it would take too long to explain, they wangle an order for the show to go on, strip-tease and all. It does, with Nutsy in it under arrest, and followed round the stage by a couple of MP's. Don't worry that it doesn't come out all right.

The scenes in which the show is rehearsed are the high spots of the evening, and you won't see anything much better than Joey Faye (who is in wonderful form), Keenan Wynn and Murray Leonard going to work on old wheezes and corny business until they become side-splitting. But the behavior of Billy Koud as the hard-boiled, perspiring director is equally funny, and the scene in which Jean Carter tries to do her strip tease with a scared and open-mouthed rookie drummer beating time for the bump is practically unforgettable.

* * *

Strip for Action is rowdy enough in its way, but it's all good clean dirt; and beyond the gags and the goofiness, there is something engagingly warm and invincibly good-natured about it. In a funny way, it manages, in addition to everything else, to seem like a soldier show—the only good one, along with *This Is the Army*, that the theater so far has produced.

The show is as good as it is not least because of Mr. Windust's direction. Without smart pacing and good eye for detail, the show's untidiness might have been much more apparent.

NEW YORK POST
October 1, 1942

"Strip for Action" Brings Burlesque Into an Army Camp

By WILELLA WALDORF

"STRIP FOR ACTION," the new show by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, would probably have seemed much funnier and more of a novelty last night at the National if Broadway had not been pretty liberally dosed with burlesque lately.

As it is, the long-awaited play by the authors of "Life With Father" is only intermittently hilarious. Its chief patrons doubtless will be gentlemen who like to be reminded of all the burlesque shows they ever saw and to guffaw loudly as the familiar jokes pass in review and the girls do the traditional quivering, bumping and stripping.

Nutsy Davis, a burlesque comedian who has joined the Army, conceives the bright idea of inviting his old company down to give a show for the boys. The musty Bijou Theatre in the nearest town is opened up for the occasion and rehearsals are progressing according to schedule when an officer intervenes. It seems burlesque is not what the Army wants its soldiers to see.

Nutsy and two pals forthwith invade the office of the Chief of Staff, a busy man about Washington, and by rather complicated means, get an order for the show to proceed, which it does.

So much rehearsing goes on that the performance seems repetitious and over-long, although it actually ran only until 11 o'clock. An enormous cast, most of whom we never managed to identify in the melee (even though their pictures were printed in the program), worked hard at the gags, and connoisseurs of burlesque will probably find a good deal to chuckle over. "Strip for Action" is a show so well done in many particulars that we should like to be able to report that it is a wow from start to finish. Unfortunately, it turned out to be a wow only now and then.

Of the huge number of actors involved—most of them in uniform—Keenan Wynn was his genial self as Nutsy. A burlesque comic named Joey Faye was funny on occasion, and another named Murray Leonard got off gags very rapidly indeed. Eleanor Lynn was a cute trick as the daughter of the star who originated the strip-tease, and Jean Carter did a good, tough routine as the leading stripper of the show.

Our favorite, however, was one Billy Koud, playing the show's director, who put the girls through their paces. Mr. Koud resembles a disgruntled, rather worried college professor, and was particularly enjoyable in moments of inspiration when working out a new routine for the "parade."

"Strip for Action"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
October 1, 1942

Strip for Action Is Highly Diverting Show

By JOHN MASON BROWN

HAVING no respect for the law of averages, Howard Lindsay, Russel Crouse and Oscar Serlin have done it again. As if in Life With Father and Arsenic and Old Lace they were not represented locally with enough successes among them, they have added another hit to their list. Strip for Action is its name; the National is the theater where you will be journeying to see it, and the Messrs. Lindsay and Crouse are its concocters.

With an accuracy uncommon among dramatists when labeling their own works, in the program at the National the Messrs. Lindsay and Crouse describe Strip for Action as a new show in two acts. This is precisely what it is, although the description fails to indicate what an entertaining show it is.

As a play Strip for Action may be negligible. It may be no more than a scenario which sometimes gets misplaced, though a scenario filled with opportunities and convulsing scenes. But as theater—gay, ebullient, topical, often uproarious, and always colorful—this saga of what happens in an army camp near Washington when a burlesque performnce is wangled for the soldiers on the night before their being sent abroad offers an excellent evening of diversion.

* * *

It makes burlesque so palatable that even Wine, Women and Song is forgotten, if not forgiven. With genuine astuteness it manages to combine the atmosphere of an army camp with that of a burlesque as seen backstage as well as from out front; burleycue—good and bad—as glimpsed through the hungry eyes of an army camp; burleycue in which brass hats and brassieres are hilariously mixed.

One leaves it with a proper contempt for the military pipsqueaks, but a new fondness for the generals, the sergeants, and the enlisted men. Yes, and for the bumpers, the teasers, the fleshpots, and the low comedians of that backstage world of which in the library Bernard Sobel is the Homer and Gypsy Rose Lee the Agatha Christie.

If the plot of Strip for Action runs thin; if at best it is something which might be considered meager in a musical comedy, this does not matter. The story more than serves its purpose. It does its ample duty as a hostess. It introduces us to people it is fun to know in situations which are amusing to share. It is enlivened, too, by countless lines and incidents that are screamingly funny.

When the plot drowses, or goes to hide in an empty cupboard, there is always burlesque to come to its aid; burlesque with its choral inanities, its historic routines, its Crummies family pride, its age-old gags, its comics, its home life, its jealousies, and its borrowed tunes.

* * *

All of these rich materials, so thoughtfully assembled by the Messrs. Lindsay and Crouse, are brilliantly used by Bretaigne Windust. He has directed Strip for Action to much more than a burlesque queen's taste. It is a populous production; indeed at moments it seems almost as populous as This Is the Army. But Mr. Windust knows his way around a crowd. With expert professionalism he keeps the show moving, gives it pace and grants it wonderful fluidity.

In the large cast Keenan Wynn proves himself to be a comedian worthy of his father. Need more be said? He is zestful and engaging, with most of his mannerisms controlled, and easily able to carry so large an assignment. Joey Faye, the little fellow who turns English into an outboard motor, is a superior clown. Let's not worry about the future comics while he is still around. Jean Carter approaches a strip-tease with the proper unction. Eleanor Lynn is a pleasant heroine. And Billy Koud, though strangely slighted among the featured players, is, as the choreographer of the troupe, one of the truest contributors to an exceptionally good evening.

P. S.—Please, Mr. Lindsay, Mr. Crouse and Mr. Serlin, do something about that picture album you are offering as a program. It is a mess. Who looks like his picture? Who wants to, anyway? I know I don't. But then I don't like looking like myself.

'STRIP FOR ACTION'

A play in two acts by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse; staged by Bretaigne Windust; designed by Raymond Sovey; presented at the National Theater on September 30, 1942, by Oscar Serlin. Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse. The cast:

Brooklyn	Coby Ruskin
Jeff	Wylie Adams
Tony	Richard Sanders
Mitch	Owen Martin
Buzz	Kenny Forbes
Dan	Bert Freed
Eddie	Jack Albertson
Hollenbeck	Jerry Thor
Tex	Don Kohler
Snag	Richard Clark
Gus	James McMahon
Clint	Charlie Kaye
Mike	Harry DeCosta
Jonesy	Harold Abbey
Farmer	Wendell Corey
Billy Miller	Billy Koud
Wolf	John Deshay
Joey	Joey Faye
Nutsy	Keenan Wynn
Harry	Murray Leonard
Florida	Jean Carter
Traps	Tommy Farrell
Mess Sergeant	Barry Kelley
Squee	Eleanor Lynn
Capt. Adams	Gordon Nelson
Major Daniels	David Kerman
Lieut. Nelson	Leonard Patrick
Commissioner Ainsley	Leslie Barrie
Chief of Staff	Harry Bannister
Gen. McPhelan	Paul Huber

and others.

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
October 1, 1942

Lindsay-Crouse Farce Succeeds in Making Burlesque Seem Funny

By JOHN ANDERSON

DOUBTLESS several records and a number of ribs and funnybones were broken at the National last night when "Strip for Action" opened. Its authors, the Messrs. Lindsay and Crouse, already have two hilarious hits running —"Life With Father" and "Arsenic and Old Lace," and the third makes them not only official wonder boys and gold dust twins, but something like chief patrons of the U. S. Mint. More than that, though, far more than that, they have finally made burlesque seem funny.

They have not written, I hasten to add, a burlesque show. They have merely scrambled a burlesque show up with the Army to suggest what happens when a girl has to get an order from the Chief of Staff to do a strip tease at a training camp. The events are wildly goofy, the characters are asylum folk, all happily delirious, and the evening a cockeyed delight. The First Audience laughed and laughed.

By a swivel-action trick, the authors have found a way to make fun of burlesque and at the same time fix burlesque so it will make fun for them. It is not only swivel-action but double-exposure, since the strippers are present, performing the accredited grinds, and bumps, but they are at the same time, subjected to hilarious travesty. It is a formula by which the authors have managed to have their cake and eat it, too.

Wrote Ed Wynn Show

Since they once wrote one of Ed Wynn's funniest shows for the Master Clown, it is only fair that they should provide suitable material at last for the Wynn son and heir.

In spite of the overshadowing evidence of his father, Keenan Wynn has frequently and plainly indicated that all he needed was the right material. He gets it in "Strip for Action" as Nutsy, a burlesque comedian whose induction into the Army seems merely an official leap into the guardhouse.

Nutsy's troubles and the play's fun begin when he brings his old pals to the camp to perform for the soldiers. He finally appears in the camp show, always within six careful paces of two grim M.P.s, and all ends happily when his commanding officer, with more humor than discipline, wonders what would happen to Germany if Nutsy were turned loose in it.

On such a sketchy outline the authors have strung some hilarious scenes. There is the convulsing moment when the burlesque girls are led in their sinuous routine by a solemn, slab-sided and cadaverous stage manager; there is the passage where Nutsy and another burlesque comic ambush the British Commissioner in the Chief of Staff's office and drive him almost crazy, and there is, finally, the wonderful idiocy of Mr. Wynn and Joey Faye in the burlesque sketches in actual performance.

Dynamic Insanity

Mr. Faye's dynamic insanity is something to unhinge the reason. His conversation made up at times simply of idiotic noises, may shift suddenly into an imitation of a locomotive, with an effect that is completely boggling. When he and Mr. Wynn get going their wilder inflections make double talk seem, by comparison, like the sign language in a company of mutes.

What small romantic thread the show has rests competently with Eleanor Lynn, whose love for Nutsy finally overcomes her inherited ambition for strip-teasing, so that we have a modest heroine who gives up her own argument that if the army is fighting for American womanhood it should have a good view of it. Murray Leonard is amusing as a burlesque actor, and Billy Koud is hilarious as the aforementioned solemn-faced stage manager with a heart of gold, the manners of an undertaker, and a comic sense that is irresistible.

If the play itself has a wayward tendency to go to pieces as it hurries along, Bretaigne Windust keeps it moving swiftly and smartly until it reaches a final hilarious heap. Since it leaves the audience in the same condition, the result is tumultuously satisfactory.

My one quarrel with the evening is over the playbill. Instead of the usual, old-fashioned cast of characters there are small pictures of the actors in make-up. They all look as anonymous and uninteresting as passport photographs, with a faint suggestion of the rogues' gallery, so that I almost looked for fingerprints.

I have seen casts I would like to fingerprint, but not this one which, after all, was only tickling.

"Strip for Action"

NEW YORK TIMES
October 1, 1942

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"Strip for Action"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

NOW that burlesque is unlawful, Broadway is full of it. In "Strip for Action," which was put on at the National last evening, Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse are paying their respects to the flesh and slapstick entertainment. As producers of "Arsenic and Old Lace," which has been housed at the Fulton for a year and a half, they are old neighbors of the Gaiety, where burlesque operated until the city fathers said "no" last Spring. "Strip for Action" is designed to give you on stage and back stage in the leg-show business in a spirit of exurberant camaraderie.

That is a good notion for sentimental comedy. With double-talking Joey Faye in the cast wearing the clown's dunce hat of burlesque, and other performers also recruited out of the defunct art, "Strip for Action" is uproariously funny in many spots. But Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse have to work hard for what they get out of the theme. Too hard, in fact. "Strip for Action" has as many cues as a musical show and as much pace as a six-day bicycle race, and only a train-announcer has voice enough to speak the lines. Somewhere along the line the work has killed the fun in the original notion.

• • •

Taking a burlesque troupe to an Army camp for a rehearsal and a performance, Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse have a chance to anatomize that racket. Catch a burlesque show in rehearsal, with furious nervous energy squandered on the commonplace, and you have one of the strangest vagaries of show business. Billy Koud, thin, hawk-nosed and irascible, formerly of the Gaiety, is the director. Some of the best stuff in "Strip for Action" shows you the routine of the girl parades. For burlesque never achieved the monotony of its production numbers without endless tedious rehearsals.

To bind all the elements of a large show together, Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse have had to invent a fantastic musical comedy plot and manufacture a many-scened production. It is not a very good plot. By the time their play is half way over you are likely to conclude that the plot is impeding a good low-comedy revue. For Joey Faye is a very funny little man when he has a chance to pitch into a burlesque number with Keenan Wynn holding his own as partner. Extravagant, noisy and fast, these routines are hilariously comic.

• • •

Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse are endeavoring to have their burlesque and kid it, too. They have hired Jean Carter, strip-artiste, and Murray Leonard, straight man with a baritone voice, and they have rounded up a long line of the limp, bored cuties who used to undulate through burlesque, chew gum and affect that far-away, condescending style of vulgarity. Eleanor Lynn, a charming little actress with a refreshing personality, is the heroine whose one obsession is stripping.

As if aware of the fact that "Strip for Action" is ponderous as a show, Bretaigne Windust has directed the performance as a prolonged scream. Every one bellows. Every one rushes at uniform pace throughout the evening. Bouncing Joey is the only performer who can make an impression on that sort of bedlam, and a black-out sketch is the only literary device that suits it. In spite of the sentimental relish and the sharp observation that have gone into it, "Strip for Action" leaves burlesque where the city fathers dropped it last Spring—a heavy, worn-out racket.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
October 1, 1942

Sprightly Nonsense

By HOWARD BARNES

THE authors of "Strip for Action" call it a show. It is the only term to cover the proceedings at the National. There is such a variety of nonsense in this new Howard Lindsay-Russel Crouse concoction that it defies pigeonholing. Mostly a burlesque of burlesque, the production skitters through a wide range of antic inventions. The point is that it does so with hilarious effect. While the material may be corny and the dramatic structure absurdity elastic, it is every inch a show and an exceedingly entertaining one.

• • •

It is a far cry from the domestic reminiscences of "Life With Father" to the cut-ups in "Strip for Action." It merely goes to show how versatile a couple of fellows can be who think in terms of theatrical diversion. In their new collaboration Lindsay and Crouse are chiefly concerned with laughter. There are some prodigious pokes at the more arrant aspects of burlesque, but there is also a lot of satirical reference to army routine. Old bits of comic dialogue and tawdry routines have been given a bright new front at the hands of the knowing authors, a resourceful company and the stage craftsmanship of Bretaigne Windust.

• • •

The plot of the offering is almost too simple to be successful. A burlesque troupe descends on a Maryland army camp, turns it more or less topsy-turvy and finally puts on a strip-tease and slap-stick entertainment. In eight or nine scenes the action jumps from a broken-down old playhouse to Army headquarters in Washington and finally embraces the whole National Theater. Without meticulous timing and a solid base of humor, it might have got completely out of hand. Fortunately, it stays in some sort of merry focus to delight genuine amusement seekers.

It would be unfair to recite some of the ancient wheezes which the writers have unearthed to give the show a comic pattern. Suffice it to say that burlesque never seemed more gawdy, disreputable and amusing than it does in this production and that such a bit of business as the Flugel Street number has all of the vitality and enchantment that it had in earlier incarnations. There is no good reason to think that "Strip for Action" will popularize burlesque in what is known as the legitimate theater, but it derives splendid foolishness from the form.

• • •

The performers play a goodly share in making a beguiling show. Keenan Wynn is first-rate as the veteran from the grind and bump circuit who gets his former pals involved in army training. Joey Faye is ingenious at pulling off familiar routines, as the double-talker of the burlesque show. Eleanor Lynn is attractive as a girl with a consuming desire to strip rather than go to Vassar and Jean Carter, Billy Koud and Murray Leonard give substance to what there is of straight drama in the goings-on. It is a huge company, sprawling out into the auditorium itself, but Windust has kept it pliable and punching, while Raymond Sovey has designed appropriate backdrops for the nonsense. "Strip for Action" is merely a show, but it is good fun.

NEW YORK SUN
October 1, 1942

'Strip for Action,' A Backstage Farce, Is Offered at the National

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

PERHAPS Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, artificers of "Life With Father" and physicians in attendance on "Arsenic and Old Lace," have taught us to expect more than we really have any right to. Now and then the boys should be allowed to let up a little; now and then it is reasonable that they should produce a stage piece no funnier than "Strip for Action," which opened last evening at the National. Life, even with Crouse and Lindsay, cannot be all beer and skittles.

And even in "Strip for Action" Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse have their moments. They raise the curtain on back-stage life on the burlesque circuit; they embroil their "elephants" and comics and strippers with the Army. They involve majors and generals and love and legs; they crack wise and they crack hearty. Now and then, if by no means always, "Strip for Action" is a rollicking show. But there does not seem to be quite enough of it to last out an evening. Toward the end there was the scatching sound of a couple of authors scraping the bottom of an idea.

The idea is that it is hard to put on a burlesque show for the benefit of soldiers on a stage largely populated by soldiers, and further infested by officers who look gloomily on the whole project. Nutsy, a comic turned soldier, has to go to Washington to see the Chief of Staff about it, taking along Squee, a pretty child who wants to be a stripper like her mother and thinks she would be wasting time at Vassar. The Chief of Staff is amiable but harried, the show goes on, for love Squee agrees to sacrifice her career. Pretty preposterous, the whole thing, isn't it?

With not much story to tell, the authors seek to make up in breadth what they lack in depth. They heap in comic details. They show the "elephants" at rehearsal, trying to remember which is left and which is right. They burlesque burlesque, which is possibly supererogation. They show burlesque comedians at their work, and unfortunately they sometimes come all too close to the original. They enjoy the anger of a stripper who cannot get a soldier drummer to follow the rhythm of her bumps. They think, in short, of almost everything—and too much of it is padding and not all of it is funny. Some of it is; the first of the two acts is a breeze, if not a gale, of laughter. Laughter dies down in the second act; there are only occasional comic gusts.

Keenan Wynn is amusing enough as Nutsy; Eleanor Lynn is gayly attractive as Squee and the enormous cast includes many other engaging performers, most of them pretty hard to identify. Jean Carter, Harry Bannister, Joey Faye, Murray Leonard and Barry Kelley are, unless I am hopelessly confused by numbers and a rather foolish experiment in program printing, among the most lively.

But there is no use pretending that "Strip for Action" isn't a considerable disappoint-

"Hello Out There"—"Magic"

NEW YORK SUN
September 30, 1942

'Hello Out There' and 'Magic' Open at the Belasco Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

EDDIE DOWLING, who is probably William Saroyan's most faithful disciple, offered that inexhaustible playwright's "Hello Out There" last evening at the Belasco, playing it as a curtain-raiser to G. K. Chesterton's two-act fantasy, "Magic." In a season which seems largely devoted to vaudeville, Mr. Dowling's gentle insistence on the drama is encouraging and laudable. It also provides an evening which is literate without being in any way disturbing.

This last is curious, since Mr. Saroyan means to disturb. "Hello Out There" is a straightforward one-act play, telling a small and touching story with simplicity. It tells of a wanderer jailed in Texas, meeting and seeing beauty in the thin slavey of the jail and falling in love with her and dying at the hands of lynchers while the bars are still between them. It is written with feeling and with a realer poignancy that Mr. Saroyan always achieves; in its fashion it is a cry for understanding and acceptance by all unhappy, forgotten people everywhere.

But it does not, for all its honest virtues—and for all the excellent playing of Mr. Dowling and Julie Haydon—come alive in the theatre. Its story is dramatic; the telling of the story is not theatrically effective. It moves you and at the same time leaves you unsatisfied; it leaves you wishing once again that Mr. Saroyan would come openly and unashamedly into the theatre and bring his evident talent with him. At any rate, it leaves me wishing this.

"Magic," which was produced here first in 1917, is witty and elusive and literary. In other words, it is Gilbert K. Chesterton, paradox and all. It tells of the visit of a conjurer to the mansion of a duke and of his meeting with an imaginative Irish girl and her violently rationalist brother, and with a clergyman of small faith and a physician of none. The duke himself, a man much given to irrelevance, sees much to be said on all sides. Much is said, by indirection, of faith and of miracles. The conjurer, who has had truck with devils, provides some authentic magic with disturbing results. The magic of love enters also.

The play, although it touches on great themes, is essentially slight and it has been rather uncertainly staged. There are seconds of drama and many minutes of talk, and not all of the talk is shaped for the purposes of the stage. Mr. Chesterton, also, never came to grips with the theater, but in his case he crowded the fire with other irons.

In "Magic" Mr. Dowling plays quietly, letting the play drift about him. Miss Haydon is sensitive as always and, as always, attractively disturbing. Stanley Harrison plays the duke with gusto and delight.

It is an evening in which gusto is to be sought out and prized. It is an evening, by and large, which makes the drama seem curiously insubstantial.

'HELLO OUT THERE'

A play in one act by William Saroyan, staged by Eddie Dowling; settings by Watson Barratt; presented at the Belasco Theater on September 29, 1942.

Photo Finish ..... Eddie Dowling
Ethel ..... Julie Haydon
The Man ..... John Farrell
Another Man ..... Farrell Pelly
The Woman ..... Ann Driscoll

'MAGIC'

A play in two acts by G. K. Chesterton, presented as a companion piece to "Hello Out There."

..... Eddie Dowling
Patricia Carleon ..... Julie Haydon
Hastings ..... Farrell Pelly
Rev. Cyril Smith ..... Bram Nossen
Dr. Grimthorpe ..... John McKee
The Duke ..... Stanley Harrison
Morris Carleon ..... Jess Barker

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
September 30, 1942

'Hello Out There' and 'Magic' at the Belasco Stars Eddie Dowling, Julie Haydon

By JOHN ANDERSON

SAROYAN'S gentle heart and Chesterton's nimble mind ought to make up an ideal evening in the theatre, and, while there are rewarding passages in the double bill presented with Eddie Dowling and Julie Haydon at the Belasco last night, the total effect is somehow miscellaneous and unsatisfying. At least, it is a comfort to hear some literate dialogue set down by first-rate writers.

Saroyan's brief playlet, "Hello, Out There," is a poignant study in loneliness, and it tells with muted anguish how a Texas jailbird fell in love with the jail cook, an ethereal girl who went out to get him a pistol, and came back to find him shot by a crowd of lynchers. It is written simply in the author's warmest tones of compassion, but it loses much of its effect through poor staging and inadequate direction. While Mr. Dowling is not ideally cast as the tragic victim, his performance is excellent, and Miss Haydon takes the honors of the evening's first round by her simple and touching portrait of the desperate little wraith, whose one hope of freedom lies with a man fatally caged.

Mr. Chesterton's long unproduced two-acter is nothing if not contrast to Saroyan's quiet heartbreak. As a man of faith and a master of paradox, he set out to show that atheists are really the worst bigots of all, and that doubt may be really a serious mental disease. He drives home his argument by making a mysterious conjurer perform what appear to be parlor tricks in an English country house.

Supernatural Trick

The truth is that one of the tricks is actually supernatural and the young man of the house, fresh from the practical affairs of American big business, nearly loses his mind trying to figure it out. When the conjurer is told that the young man may actually become insane unless the trick is explained, he invents an apparently natural explanation, and the young man, happy in the lie, begins to recover his scrambled wits.

There is an amiable glow of intellect about the little drama and the quality of a fastidious mind. But somehow it has an archaic effect, like a minuet, prettily antique and remote. There are stray lines of sharp Chestertonian wit, and some amusing characterizations, notably the Duke, who blandly takes both sides of every question, "because after all we must have progress." It is a part played with infinite relish and fine skill by Stanley Harrison.

Nameless Conjuror

Mr. Dowling plays the nameless conjurer with the same power and persuasiveness that made his work in "The Time of Your Life" and "Here Comes the Clowns" so memorable. His performance is resourceful, eloquent and deeply sincere, and it calmly surmounts, by its direct expression of faith, the risks of elf-talk and pixie-work involved in the dialogue.

Miss Haydon seemed almost as baffled as I was by a part which seems largely a collection of odd exits. The two stars are well supported by Bram Nossen, John McKee and Jess Barker.

Perhaps the whole program could be made more effective by having one intermission between playlets, and cutting down the padding, but anyway you take them they make up strangely assorted entertainments and an evening that is peculiarly eccentric.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
September 30, 1942

'Magic' and 'Hello, Out There,' Played by Dowling at Belasco

"Magic," a drama by G. K. Chesterton, and "Hello, Out There," a drama by William Saroyan. Produced by Edward Dowling at the Belasco Theatre, New York, Sept. 29, 1942.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON, the English essayist, who died in 1936, and William Saroyan, who is very much alive today, express a common purpose in two short dramas which Eddie Dowling produced at the Belasco Theatre last night.

They both are searching for answers to the common mysteries. They would both very much like to know what all the living's for, and why?

Chesterton, being practiced in the search in 1913, when he wrote "Magic," and the more profound philosopher of the two, was content to let the question rest with the belief that any true faith conquers doubt and should be sufficient. In 1922 he quieted his own perplexities by embracing Catholicism.

Saroyan is still begging the question. His "Hello, Out There" is the short tragedy of a roving misfit who was arrested in Texas on a charge of rape by a lying wife, and shot down in jail by her husband. The jail cook, an unhappy child, is his comforter.

This is a double bill of drama that is not likely to make a wide appeal. The two plays, well acted by Mr. Dowling and Julie Haydon, provide an interesting evening in the theatre, but only for those of speculative mind who are themselves intrigued by any intelligent discussion of human problems.

In 1917

Chesterton's "Magic" was his only play to reach production in America. A company organized by the first Mrs. Norman Hapgood produced it in 1917, with O. P. Heggie and Cathleen Nesbitt in the chief roles.

It is the tale of an imaginative Irish girl whose belief in fairies, as well as her faith in the supernatural, is briefly shattered by the appearance of a professional conjurer.

The conjurer's defense of his illusions is variously contested by a confessed agnostic, a churchman and a doctor who speaks for the scientists.

The girl's excitable brother, filled with rebellious doubt, is saved from temporary madness by a confession from the conjurer as to how he did his last and most mysterious trick.

Whether that confession was or was not trumped up to meet the emergency each mystified auditor is privileged to decide for himself.

"Magic," as said, is a holding play only to those whose interest it may attack. The argument is as obscure as it is frequently brilliantly written.

Good Acting

"Hello, Out There," stemming from Saroyan's belief in the fundamental goodness of all his beautiful people, and in the practically universal loneliness of human hearts, is told in the terms of a grim little tragedy.

It offers, I think, the best acting of the evening, on both Dowling's and Miss Haydon's part. They understand these two unhappy people, whirled through a climax in their lives, and play them with feeling and impressive sensitiveness.

The settings by Watson Barratt and the lighting by Fedor are helpful aids. Last night's audience was friendly and impressed or unimpressed, according to its lights. Again the playgoers' guide reads: Proceed with caution.

"Hello Out There"—"Magic"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
September 30, 1942

Lightning Fails to Strike Once

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

LAST nights' double bill provided an "interesting" evening in the theater rather than an interesting one. Mr. Saroyan has made the better contribution, if only because *Hello Out There* reveals him in a fairly unfamiliar mood, while *Magic* is—and must have been even when first produced—all too-familiar Chesterton. Both plays, however different in content, are alike in being the work of men who can handle dialogue, but not quite manage drama. *Hello Out There*, however, offers a genuinely dramatic situation where *Magic* has only a purely theatrical one. Saroyan, too, is content to draw a picture where Chesterton is determined to preach. The result is that you are much more interested in what Saroyan is trying to do than in what Chesterton is trying to say.

Mr. Saroyan's one-acter tells of a man locked in a small-town Texas jail. He is falsely charged with rape and dies at the end, a victim of mob violence. But before the mob gets to him, he talks from his cell to the young girl who does the cooking for the jail. It is the talk of a partly frightened man, but much more that of a desperately lonely one; and it is addressed to a desperately lonely girl. Saroyan has not individualized his characters; he has merely created a mood. The thing, at moments, is extremely touching. But it is not sustained; it lacks intensity. And it is not controlled; Saroyan wanders away, too often, into words.

* * *

Chesterton used the supernatural in many forms as a way of preaching religious faith; and in *Magic* he chose to introduce it into the theater. In it he pictures various types of men who refuse to believe in miracles, and then proceeds to confound them with one. The worldly priest, the man of science, the materialistic young American, the duke who sees two sides to every question are good game for a round of dialectics and natural targets for Chesterton's satiric comment. *Magic* is spattered with wit, including the famous "I hate a quarrel because it interrupts an argument," but it is also swimming with talk and finally drowns in a sea of didacticism. Chesterton can be as incisive as Shaw, but he lacks Shaw's gift of making ideas dramatic in themselves. It would be inaccurate to call *Magic* dated. It was always, theatrically speaking, dead. Nor did last night's ragged production do anything to call it back to life.

Mr. Dowling and Miss Haydon played leading parts in both productions, but gave good accounts of themselves in different ones. Mr. Dowling was suave and effective as Chesterton's conjurer, but seemed to me unimpressive as the prisoner in *Hello Out There*. Miss Haydon was an appealing figure in the Saroyan play, but did much less well with her much less rewarding part in *Magic*.

NEW YORK TIMES
September 30, 1942

"Hello, Out There" and "Magic"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SOME professionals have taken hold of a short play by Saroyan, and the results are stunning. The play is "Hello, Out There," and the professionals are Eddie Dowling and Julie Haydon, who put it on at the Belasco last evening. Only about a month ago Saroyan was staging two of his own plays at the same theatre, and the results were unprofessional and shattering.

As a drama, "Hello, Out There" is a considerable improvement on its two vagabond predecessors. It has intelligible form. In a jail-house in Matador, Texas, Saroyan finds an amiable gambler who has been locked up unjustly and is lonely. "Hello, Out There!" he keeps crying into the emptiness of the jail. The cry is answered by a wretched girl who drudges in the jail and is lonely for companionship. Saroyan's play is like the orchestration of a mood. Two friendless people meet, talk, exchange confidences and dream of a fine life together until the ruthless world outside destroys them.

* * *

Since Saroyan has a theme and the characters to convey it, all the details of "Hello, Out There" fall neatly into place. Saroyan does not have to turn handsprings to simulate vitality. But he must share with theatre professionals the credit for a superb evocation of love in an angry, treacherous world. As the prisoner and as the prison drudge, respectively, Mr. Dowling and Miss Haydon give a lyrical performance of great enchantment. His warmth and fervor and her quaint sincerity nourish the lines Saroyan has written and fill his fable with both tender and rebellious emotions.

All the other people associated with this brief enterprise have understood Saroyan and helped him. Watson Barrett's scene of the jail house, which Feder has lighted, is imaginative theatre work. John Farrell, Farrell Pelley and Ann Driscoll, the other three actors in the cast, leave just the right impression on the performance. Although "Hello, Out There" is a small play, it is a perfect creation and the freshest episode in the theatre this season.

* * *

It is a good deal shorter than G. K. Chesterton's "Magic," which is the main dish of the evening. But the main dish is extraordinarily hard to devour. "Magic" was first played in this country in 1917 by O. P. Heggie and Cathleen Nesbitt, sharing the bill with a Galsworthy drama. Written in a vein of literary facetiousness, it argues the case for forces beyond the knowledge of science and it provides one actor with what probably looks like a fat part on paper. But "Magic" is only a prolonged and somewhat tortured tergiversation in an outmoded style of writing. It does not contain a hundredth part of the magic that flows out of Saroyan's vaulting little play.

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"Hello Out There"—"Magic"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
September 30, 1942

Saroyan's Hello Out There And Chesterton's Magic

By JOHN MASON BROWN

JULIE HAYDON and Eddie Dowling appeared last night at the Belasco in plays by two authors animated by faith. The first of these dramas was William Saroyan's poignant one-act Hello Out There; the second, G. K. Chesterton's Magic, which was given its original production hereabouts in the dark days of the last war.

The faith that Mr. Chesterton and Mr. Saroyan share is tantalizingly different. They state it differently, and in each case its geography is as dissimilar as are its concerns. In common they both accept, as these blessed with faith must. But the miracles Mr. Saroyan sings are earth-sprung while Chesterton's reached to heaven. Mr. Saroyan needs no clergyman to preach through or at. He believes in man as jubilantly as Mr. Chesterton believed in God.

• • •

Although both of them deal—as deal they must—with what lies beyond reason, Mr. Saroyan feels his way to his faith where Mr. Chesterton thought his. In his heart, Mr. Saroyan is confident of man's goodness just as in his heart he is aware of man's loneliness in the midst of cruelty. Mr. Chesterton, on the other hand, uses his head and showers paradoxes to prove that in relating man to his God there comes a point beyond which thought is thoughtless. His was the faith of an intellectual, argued with brilliant literateness, whereas Mr. Saroyan's is the faith of a vigorous emotionalist, backed up by enchanting perceptions.

Although Mr. Chesterton could stand England on its head while championing the Church, Mr. Saroyan can quicken America's heart by asking it to abandon reason. The one was a master of intricacies; the other is a master of simplicities. Mr. Chesterton is as sophisticated as Mr. Saroyan is naïve. Yet both in defense of their faiths have written fantasies which are fairy tales possessed of gaiety; in Mr. Chesterton's case one that is witty in the heat of argument, in Mr. Saroyan's one that is humorous in the midst of tragedy.

In the library Mr. Saroyan's Hello Out There is one of the most moving one-acts to have come out of the contemporary theater. On the printed page it is an unforgettable picture of human loneliness and frustration, done with admirable originality in terms of a man, in love with his jailer's daughter, who has been injustly imprisoned for rape. It is a more violent, and far more bitter drama than Mr. Saroyan has so far written. But even in this story of a Southern lynching party Mr. Saroyan's faith in man's goodness is present, adding to the pathos of the situation and ennobling it.

Although Miss Haydon is touching as the girl, and Mr. Dowling reads the man's speeches excellently, the play is only partially released at the Belasco. Mr. Dowling is too old for the part. The lynching mob is handled clumsily. The direction is amateurish; the lighting is shadowless; the setting uncontributive. The result is that a fine play, though it shows its virtues, is somewhat smothered.

Mr. Chesterton's Magic fares better, although it still does everything but excite to satisfaction. This story of the conjurer who believes in the supernatural, and in a ducal household demonstrates his talents and his faith before an agnostic, a doubting clergyman, an hilarious Duke who is always seeing both sides of a question and quoting the names of irrelevant great men to prove his points, a surly oil man from America, and his fay-like sister, is a remarkable tour-de-force.

Although talky, it is the work of an amazing conversationalist. Mr. Dowling is admirable as the challenged conjurer; Miss Haydon, who is lovely to look at in her flowing dresses, charmingly captures the enchanted qualities of the young girl, and Stanley Harrison is highly entertaining as the soft-headed Duke. But the play, in spite of the uncommon virtues of its thinking and the sparkle of its paradoxes, does not quite come off. It, too, suffers in production.

The sad truth is that this double bill at the Belasco is meant for special audiences, and even these audiences it is apt to leave far colder than they want to be left and far colder than the two scripts deserve. What should have been a limited success turns out to be a brave and interesting failure.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
September 30, 1942

New and Old

By HOWARD BARNES

THE dignity, eloquence and beauty which have been so wanting in the theater recently are to be found again at the Belasco. It is a singular bill which Eddie Dowling has chosen to present there. For a curtain-raiser it has a new and magnificent one-act play by the same William Saroyan who disappointed us earlier this season with a pair of fragmentary dramas. There is nothing fragmentary about "Hello Out There." It ranks with the finest pieces of its genre which have emerged on our stage. As a supplementary offering one is privileged to see a revival of G. K. Chesterton's "Magic."

• • •

The plays are not well matched. It may have seemed like a brilliant stroke of showmanship to combine the mystical realism of the Saroyan work with Chesterton's allegorical fantasy. On the stage, following one another after a brief intermission, "Magic" is anti-climactic and a bit dated. There are few plays I can think of, however, which could top the brilliance of writing and performance that makes "Hello Out There" a genuine event of the new season. A splendid new drama and a provocative old one constitute quite an evening's entertainment, no matter how you look at it.

• • •

If there ever was a felicitous theatrical collaboration, it is that of Saroyan and Dowling. As in the case of "The Time of Your Life," a knowing actor and producer has taken a vibrant piece of dramatic writing in "Hello Out There" and given it complete realization. The tale of a drifting gambler, finding companionship with a lonely soul in a Texas jail, where he has been wrongly locked up on a rape charge, is so full of compassion and meaning at the Belasco that you can scarcely afford to miss it. Here is the theatre at the height of its power.

There is none of the muddled exuberance in this one-act drama which has caused so many Saroyan works to be disappointing. It cleaves to a straight pattern from start to end. It voices the agony and beauty of human existence as have very few plays of the modern theater. With Dowling giving a superlative performance of the forlorn jailbird and Julie Haydon contributing a truly illuminating portrayal of a small-town stray, it is an electric and memorable show.

• • •

Small wonder that "Magic" comes with a certain let-down after the strength and splendor of "Hello Out There." It is a pity, too, for the Chesterton fantasy has its quota of beauty and stage sorcery. Even after twenty-five years, it is provocative and well worth seeing. Its examination of material and spiritual values as seen through the eyes of the great champion of the world of faery moves slowly through several scenes, but it takes on tremendous vitality before the final curtain.

Once again here the play is indebted to the production. Dowling gives the conjurer of "Magic" every intonation that could possibly be derived from the character. Miss Haydon is not far behind him in the part of a child turning into a woman, who discovers some of the mystery of living. The supporting players, as in the Saroyan curtain-raiser, are excellent. Eddie Dowling has served the season well. He has given us the sort of new and old theater which makes theater-going eminently satisfying.

NEW YORK POST
September 30, 1942

"Magic" and "Hello Out There" a Double Bill at the Belasco

By WILELLA WALDORF

G. K. CHESTERTON'S "Magic" was first produced on Broadway in 1917. It is not the sort of play that is ever apt to become what New York calls a smash hit, but there is more to it, surely, than one would suspect from Eddie Dowling's revival last night at the Belasco Theatre.

Except for Mr. Dowling's own performance as the Irish conjurer who performs feats of magic and lectures on faith at a Duke's country house, the Chesterton work was disappointingly projected at the Belasco.

As the Duke, Stanley Harrison had some of the author's wittiest lines to speak, but he mouthed them at the audience with a knowing leer that robbed them of much of their spontaneity. The Duke was just a Clown Prince.

Julie Haydon played His Grace's Irish niece who believes in fairies, witches and elves, and is disappointed to discover that the fascinating gnome she met in the garden was only a professional magician. Just the sort of role Miss Haydon revels in. But she struck us as self-conscious and ill at ease, and she became monotonous, though "Magic" is a shortish play.

The rest filled in none too effectively while the backstage technicians performed feats of magic on cue, and Mr. Dowling gave a quiet, warmly sympathetic performance.

In general, however, the Chesterton work seems more rewarding on the printed page than it did as performed last night at the Belasco.

Saroyan As Curtain Raiser

Since "Magic" is not a full-length play, Mr. Dowling presented as a curtain-raiser William Saroyan's short piece, "Hello Out There."

It is not the sort of play one has come to expect of the self-styled genius of the theatre. It is more tensely dramatic than most Saroyan works, and it does not promote his life is swell and people are beautiful philosophy. Laid in a small-town Texas jail, it concerns a gambler accused of rape, and ends violently when a number of misguided citizens take what they call justice into their own hands.

Less stunty, more grimly realistic than the customary Saroyan, "Hello Out There" also manages to suggest a dated quality, as if it might have been written, say, ten years ago. It carries a dramatic punch, but it is the sort of playlet earnest little theatre groups have been doing for years out in the open spaces—and doing very well.

Never one of Mr. Saroyan's more abject admirers, we found it, on the whole, a relief from some of his recent fantasies. But the musty odor persists.

Mr. Dowling gave another good performance as the prisoner and Miss Haydon seemed happier as the lonely small-town girl who cooks food in the jail than she was as the gay lady in "Magic."

"Wine, Women and Song"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
September 29, 1942

Wine (Flat), Women (Dull) and Song (a Requiem)

By JOHN MASON BROWN

ALTHOUGH the G-String Murder was written by Gypsy Rose Lee, it was committed by the players at the Ambassador last night. For there, under the name of Wine, Women and Song, burlesque died a painful and a lingering death. It died, moreover, without the fatherly blessing of any managers who would give even their first names to their shoddy production. And it died ignobly, pretending to be something else—vaudeville, in fact—so that its rolling rhinestones would gather no Commissioner Moss.

If the Little Flower were as interested in suppressing dullness as he is in having boys improve their male parents, he would encourage the children of all people who attend Wine, Women and Song to write to him reporting their elders' whereabouts, and he would deal with these adults harshly. Because a more tiresome, witless and deadly example of poor showmanship would be frightening to dream of.

• • •

Even Jimmy Savo cannot persuade the dullness to stay away from his usually entertaining door. He proves to be as grubby as the show in which he finds himself. Only occasionally does a flicker of the former Savo shine through the darkness of his present pantomimes. In these his poor taste, which has always been incipient, downs his art, which is real, at almost every turn. I never imagined the day would come when Mr. Savo's capering and scrapings in River, Stay Away from My Door, would make me indifferent to how close that river got to Mr. Savo. But last light I decided it did come close enough.

In the realm of strip-teasers, Margie Hart has a larger following than a wardrobe. Though she has her points, she is not in Miss Lee's class. She lacks the style, the nonchalance, the nuance and the classicism. She merely treats the orchestra as if it were a hickory tree. And that is that. As a comedian she is as far from laughter as Wine, Women and Song is from gaiety. The chassis is all right but the gasoline rationing is cruel.

• • •

A good many other maidens are in an unsecretive mood at the Ambassador just now. And if you like impersonators the young Wesson Brothers are extremely good, even if their impersonations are better than their taste. Yet the evening is a monument to ennui; a yawn stretched so far that it is painful to remember; and an entertainment which is nonexistent. It is imitation Minsky pretending to be real mink, and asking a ridiculous price for boredom. All it does is to turn sex into siesta, theater-going into a wake and burlesque for the nonce into a mangled cadaver.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
September 29, 1942

Bad Burlesque

By HOWARD BARNES

THE theater did a small job of abdication last evening. Instead of offering a play, a musical, or even a show of sorts, it came up with a tedious melange of strip teases, bumps and stale obscenities. The low-water mark in stage doings is hard to chart, but "Wine, Women and Song" is right in there with the worst ebb tides of taste, imagination and craftsmanship. Even with the great Jimmy Savo contributing moments of pantomimic magnificence, the Ambassador exhibit is an affront to both the theater and the public which supports it.

• • •

For "Wine, Women and Song" borrows from burlesque and only succeeds in being a very bad burlesque show. Those who fancy the coy and comic inventions of an ancient form of make-believe will find them curiously ineffective in this hodge podge of fan dances and dramatic fatuities. Those who want the stage to cut loose at a time when it might at least contribute an evening of entertainment are likely to consider the proceedings at the Ambassador as offensive as they are dull. The theater's debt to burlesque is considerable, as any one can discover by checking up on the apprenticeships of our leading comedians. After Monday night, it owes it next to nothing.

• • •

To be sure, Savo is on hand in baggy pants and bangs to give a few glinting intervals of distinction to a wretched show. When he does his absurd slack-wire stunt or plays card tricks with the audience, this transplanted giriy-giriy show is well worth watching. Being a fellow of catholic tastes, I found him funny even when he was running through that old routine of encountering a shapely mouse and trying to keep her from clipping him. Most of the time, the celebrated clown is working alone, and deserves no more than your heartfelt sympathy.

• • •

The surrounding sketches and production numbers of "Wine, Women and Song" would do little credit to a broken-down night club. Margie Hart strips and poses rather uncomfortably. There are a number of supposed funny men who can't even get their lines straight with the most ancient wise cracks imaginable. There are show girls and some prancing dancers. If any one staged the production, it is not apparent. The same goes for the settings and costumes. If the theater has to go to burlesque for inspiration, it should present something better than dregs.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
September 29, 1942

"Wine, Women and Song" Off the Cheaper Burlesque Shelf

"Wine, Women and Song," burlesque revue presented at the Ambassador Theatre, New York, Sept. 28, 1942.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

"WINE, WOMEN AND SONG" at the Ambassador is the sort of entertainment we must expect, following the success of "The Star and Garter." Showmen are nothing if not imitative. Curiously they usually imitate the worst rather than the best features of a success.

The claim will be made for this burlesque revue, which stars Jimmy Savo, the popular pantomimist, and Margie Hart, who has adopted the strip tease as a career, is that it costs its patrons less than half as much as the model it seeks to copy.

The answer to which is that it is worth, in the entertainment market, less than half of that. It is completely lacking in novelty, is barren of anything resembling originality and is meagerly supplied with talent.

Mr. Savo's specialty, including his whispered confidences regarding "Old Man River," is still a minor classic in the pantomime field.

Exposure an Art

But now that we become familiar with the technique of the stripteuse we fail to discover those traces of a defensive art in Miss Hart's revealings that characterize the unconventional divestments of the more generously endowed Gypsy Rose Lee.

The one is exposure touched with art. The other is exposure under a spotlight.

Pictorially one result may be as acceptable as the other. Both ladies would appear to have everything necessary to the achievement of a career. But there is a considerable difference in audience satisfaction.

From burlesque comes Herbie Faye, with the makings of a comedian as soon as he forgets Bert Lahr. Also, I assume, Isabelle Brown and Marian Miller. Miss Brown and Miss Miller shiver realistically from their shoulders to their heels, Miss Miller in a white light, Miss Brown in illuminated breast plates and girdle.

The Wesson brothers offer a series of radio imitations, the one supplying makeup and grimaces, the other the voices that go with them. They were easily the most popular of last evening's contributors, being sufficiently clever to excuse a friendly cartooning of the F. D. Roosevelts.

There is a good looking chorus of shapely girls. Nothing can be said for the production, but there are some fairly attractive costumes.

Last night's audience seemed more stunned than startled.

NEW YORK POST
September 29, 1942

"Wine, Women and Song" a Mistake at the Ambassador

By WILELLA WALDORF

ACCORDING to the program at the Ambassador Theatre last night, nobody produced "Wine, Women and Song." It just happened, and it was a mistake.

Full of quivers, bumps and lethargic strip-tease, it is a cheap and tasteless show that succeeds in being monumentally dull from beginning to end. Even Jimmy Savo, whose pantomime has occasionally been funny in the past, seemed unable to do anything to help.

Margie Hart, co-starred in the proceedings, appeared with and without clothes, sundry "comedians" acted pointless sketches and Noel Toy performed a fan dance, although we thought fan dancing went out of fashion when Sally Rand took up Ibsen.

Broadway standards may not be very high, but they are far above "Wine, Women and Song."

"Wine, Women and Song"

NEW YORK SUN
September 29, 1942

'Wine, Women and Song,' Burlesque Show, Is Offered At the Ambassador

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

BURLESQUE, having been ejected through Broadway's back door, has contrived to re-enter by the front. Masquerading as two-a-day vaudeville and calling itself "Wine, Women and Song," it took over the Ambassador Theater last evening. Miss Margie Hart, Jimmy Savo and anatomy are starred and nothing good comes of any of it. Burlesque, it appears, is merely tiresome.

Miss Hart, long celebrated as a denuder, performs her specialized tasks with cheerful enthusiasm, explaining the while that she is making her sacrifices for the war effort. This is what is known as striking the topical note. And as strippers go, which is often pretty far, Miss Hart is evidently satisfactory. She is thorough-going and the results are all that could be wished. I doubt, however, that the strip-tease is a sufficient evening's entertainment to any one over 16.

Miss Hart is scantily aided by Mr. Savo, who seldom appears and is not, I feel, quite at the top of his form. He pops his eyes, he shuffles, he sings, "River, Stay Away From My Door" and he walks a piece of string laid out on the stage. Cigar, drooping trousers and card tricks are present, as is the woebegone expression of chagrin when the tricks fail. Memory says these things once were mildly funny, but memory has been wrong before. Now, at any rate, they are tepid.

The chorus girls in their bits of net, the person known dreadfully as the "Queen of Quiver," the sketches and the jokes and the dialogues—these are not tepid. These are, by and large, very nearly intolerable. They are also, for the most part, extremely derivitive and now and then remarkably vulgar. Nor will you, let us hope, be enamored of the female contortionist or of Miss Hart's languid efforts to act; you will surely be chagrined at some of the costumes draped on the overwhelmingly rounded bodies of the show girls.

Let's pretend none of it happened, shall we?

'WINE, WOMEN AND SONG'

An entertainment in two acts; ensembles by Truly McGee; decor by Frederick Fox; presented anonymously at the Ambassador Theatre on September 28, 1942. In the cast are Margie Hart, Jimmy Savo, the Wesson Brothers, Pinky Lee, Herbie Faye, Marian Miller, Isabelle Brown, Noel Toy, the Don Ritz Favorettes, Murray Briscoe, Evelyn Farney, Ruth Mason, Murry White and others.

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
September 29, 1942

Margie Hart and Jimmy Savo Play Chief Roles in Show at Ambassador

By JOHN ANDERSON

SOMETIME before the playbill for "Wine, Women and Song" was rushed from the printer (though there was no great hurry) to the Ambassador Theatre last night, the sponsor discreetly removed his name from the production. He is, to be congratulated upon his anonymity. If he had only printed his name and removed the programme we could thank him for a fine public service.

For of all the recent outbreaks of alleged vaudeville and semi-burlesque, "Wine, Women, etcetera" is most firmly and irresistibly tiresome. Its routines are so stale and its humor so laughless it seems merely a collection of theatrical debris from which the most patriotic junkman could extract only a certain amount of brass.

It contains, to be sure, Miss Margie Hart, one of the more celebrated epidermis girls who sheds her garments in what has been erroneously called a strip tease. Though her structure seems sound and handsomely shaped, the disrobing stunt has about the allurement of a tired salesclerk taking off a mannequin in a Fifth avenue window.

Fun at Low Tide

The show contains, also to be sure, Jimmy Savo, who has seemed to me at times in the past to be an immensely amusing comedian. But Mr. Savo is not up to his mark. His one sketch with Miss Margie is too long and too tenuous, and even when he sings his admitted classic, "River Stay Away From My Door," the fun stays stubbornly at low tide.

For the rest, I can provide even less enthusiasm. Noel Toy, oriental nudist and fan twitcher, produces some novel effects in ostrich feathers and other sinuous equipment, and the Wesson Brothers offer a few impersonations—one supplying the voice and the other the facial caricature. Their item on President and Mrs. Roosevelt, while unquestionably clever, seemed of definitely questionable taste.

Numerous teams of gagsters attacked the assembled funnybones, but their aim seemed to be uniformly bad. They doubtless intended to throw the customers in the aisles, but threw them, instead, into the dumps.

Not even the ushers seemed to be applauding.

NEW YORK TIMES
September 29, 1942

Burlesque at Vaudeville Prices

By BROOKS ATKINSON

FURTHER experiments in strip-teasing at respectable prices are studiously conducted in "Wine, Women and Song," which was put on at the Ambassador last evening. Margie Hart, the red-haired houri of the late departed burlesque, drops nearly everything and gets down to the old business toward closing time. Having been forbidden by civic authority to look at strip-teasing, this reporter merely peeked through his fingers last evening to make sure that burlesque had returned to life under the name of vaudeville or musical show in a properly licensed theatre. But there was no doubt about it. "Wine, Women and Song" is a fire-sale "Star and Garter." It costs about four times as much as the Forty-second Street vendors would have charged for it when they were permitted to put on girlie shows along the midway.

* * *

It has a further resemblance to burlesque. Excepting for the presence of Jimmy Savo, the shiny-faced droll, it is generally monotonous. Margie Hart, the clothes dispensary, impersonates wickedness with noticeable assurance, singing an occasional simple-minded lyric. Minor comedians rush through some burlesque routines, not without an occasional flicker of amusement, and females of minor achievement introduce the bumps, the grind and the openwork fan dance.

Why does the cherubic Jimmy turn up in frowzy shows of this nature? He is not a versatile mountebank. "River, Stay Away From My Door" is still the most joyful expression of his innocent nature, and New York has heard it a great many times. But as far as this column is concerned, his pantomime singing of that song has yet to be heard once too often. For Jimmy's happy little tramp with his rhapsodic walk and gleaming confidences to the audience is a wonderful creation. Whatever he happens to be doing at the moment is incidental to what he is.

* * *

Here he is stirring a little sweetening into the fleshpots. It is a sorry business. For "Wine, Women and Song" is not interested in Jimmy Savo. It is a routine burlesque show with Margie Hart performing a little further uptown than usual.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
September 29, 1942

Nothing's Wrong with the Wine

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IF MEMORY serves, it's in O. Henry's *A Municipal Report* that a group of people view the body of a prize heel, racking their brains for something nice to say about the dead. Finally one of them manages to remark: "When George was in the seventh grade, he was one of the best spellers in the class."

Though one isn't quite so hard pressed with *Wine, Women and Song*, any eulogy must nonetheless be both temperate and brief. The seats sell at popular prices. Jimmy Savo is at times a droll and appealing comic, and he still holds the patent on *River Stay Away From My Door*. And Margie Hart, as is scarcely news, has mastered the technique of the strip tease.

Otherwise, *Wine, Women and Song* must be set down as one of the unhappiest of recent Broadway experiences. Whether you choose to call it vaudeville or burlesque, it drops into last place for shoddiness, poor showmanship, and the ability to be dull. On the comedy side, it can be described literally as a show without a laugh. On the carnal side, it hasn't a trace of the oomph and dash, the gaiety and glitter, of *Star and Garter*. It hasn't even the lowdown merits of well-paced, well-spotlighted burleycue. There are, to be sure, a number of ladies who go through the motions, every last one of them, in fact; there is even Miss Marian Miller, the Queen of Quiver, who in those three words describes her art better than I could hope to do in a paragraph. But somehow in all this fleshiness there is very little allure.

As for the comedy numbers, one can only suppose that they were applauded at the end because it *was* the end. Divers people took turns doing things like pronouncing hors d'oeuvres "horse derbies." Four young women offered a frolicksome version of Liszt's *Second Hungarian Rhapsody* that had all the merry roguishness of a skit at a Mt. Holyoke chafing-dish party in 1882. The Wesson Brothers did some take-offs that are likely to land the noble art of impersonation in a class with narcotics and white slavery. There's a sketch called—but it makes no sense to prolong the agony. I feel quite sure that *Wine, Women and Song* is no deep-dyed plot. It is merely a horrible mistake.